THIS IS THE TIME
Interview with Two Namibian Women
To the Women of Namibia

This is the Time...
This is the time
we were all waiting for.
Our guns are light in our hands
the reasons and aims
of the struggle
are clear in our minds.

The blood shed by our heroes
makes us sad but resolute.
It is the price of our freedom.
We keep them close in our hearts
from their example new generations
-- revolutionary generations --
are already being born.

Ahead of us we see bitter hardships.
But we see also
our children running free
our country plundered no more.

This is the time to be ready
and firm.
The time to give ourselves
to the Revolution.

Josina Machel
PRELIMO, Mozambique

This booklet is published on August 26, 1977 in commemoration of the 11th anniversary of the beginning of SWAPO's armed struggle in Namibia.

by the CHICAGO COMMITTEE FOR AFRICAN LIBERATION
1476 West Irving Park Road
Chicago, Illinois 60613
(312-348-3370)

The CHICAGO COMMITTEE FOR AFRICAN LIBERATION was originally organized in 1971 as the Chicago Committee for the Liberation of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea, to provide material, financial and political support for the liberation movements in Southern Africa. The Committee works to end U.S. military, economic and political support of minority rule and neo-colonialism in Africa; and to help clarify the links between the struggle of people in Africa and our own struggle against imperialism and for a better life in the U.S.

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Sun of Our Freedom: Independence in Guinea-Bissau (1972)
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O.M.A. button (official symbol of the Organization of Angolan Women)
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Namibia: An Occupied Country

Namibia, or South West Africa, has been a focal point of international conflict for the past one hundred years. The territory is now illegally occupied by the Republic of South Africa. Conquered by the Germans in the late 19th Century, Namibia was turned over to South Africa as a mandate by the League of Nations after World War I. Numerous United Nations investigations have shown that the terms of that trust have been seriously violated. On October 27, 1966, the General Assembly formally terminated the mandate and declared Namibia to be under the direct responsibility of the United Nations. How the territory came to be the concern of any of the successive external powers involved - Germany, South Africa, the League and the United Nations - can only be understood, however, by examining the concrete situations and history of Namibia.

HISTORY

Namibia lies along the South Atlantic coast of Africa, its reasonably well-watered central plateau bounded by desert along the coast and on much of the eastern frontier. The coastal Namib ("shield") desert long discouraged European penetration. The wetter interior was inhabited by several African peoples who were farmers, herders, and hunters. These groups were joined in the 17th and 18th centuries by peoples fleeing the colonialism of South Africa.

The Germans acquired South West Africa in 1884 at the Congress of Berlin, as part of Germany's drive to catch up with the more established colonial powers. German rulers and businessmen were determined to make up for their scarcity of colonies with ruthless exploitation of the ones they had obtained. False treaties, skillful use of inter-African disputes, and overt repression were used to quell resistance. Four-fifths of the territory was established as a Police Zone, as it remains today, where white rights were paramount.

SOUTH AFRICA AND NAMIBIA

After Germany's defeat in World War I, South West Africa was turned over to the Union of South Africa as a mandate or "trust territory." South Africa was supposed to develop the territory on terms of equality for the residents, with the goal of ultimately bringing it to self-government and independence. In fact, however, South Africa extended and intensified the oppression of the Namibian people. The South African apartheid system, with its pass laws, contract labor, forced population removals, and "homelands" system, were applied in such a way that some observers consider conditions in Namibia to be even worse than those in South Africa. In 1969 South Africa incorporated "South West Africa" as its fifth province.
ECONOMIC PENETRATION AND UNITED STATES INTERESTS

The vast mineral wealth of the region (especially diamonds and uranium), as well as the export potential of karakul pelts and fish products, has attracted numerous international corporations into the area. These corporations are eager to take advantage of quick returns on their investments, as well as extremely "favorable" terms for the sale of labor. African workers' wages range from $8.40 to $49 per month. The fruits of their labor have poured out of Namibia, benefitting stockholders in Europe and North America and impoverishing the Africans.

United States Corporations have large investments in mining and fishing, owning several large companies and up to a one third share in many of the South African firms. One American company, the Tsumeb Corporation*, mines most of the base minerals and is the single largest employer of Africans in Namibia. In 25 years of existence, Tsumeb has extracted $1 billion worth of minerals from Namibia and it annually gives South Africa $14 million in taxes. Other U.S. corporations are involved in uranium and diamond extraction, oil exploration, and fishing. Led by Del Monte, the U.S. fishing industry takes 90% of the Namibian annual catch to sell in the U.S. as canned sardines and dried food for pet animals and fish. Meanwhile the Namibian people suffer from severe protein deficiency.

Canadian-based Falconbridge Cooper Mining Co. extracts profits of more than $3.5 million annually, but pays its workers an equivalent of $2 per day. The Hudson Bay Company controls 60% of the karakul fur trade worth $70 million annually, yet its workers are paid $4.50 to $17 per month.

While the U.S. and Canadian governments "officially" denounce apartheid, North American corporations utilize the entire apartheid system of pass laws and contract labor for the sake of profit.

Militarily, the United States has lined up in support of South Africa's occupation. A U.N. advisor reported in the fall of 1976 that the U.S. military has been actively training and supplying a black Namibian army to fight against SWAPO and has aided in training South Africa's occupation force of 50,000. The U.S. intends to extend its influence in Namibia by supporting South Africa's plan to make Namibia "independent." This plan would create a confederation of ethnic

*Tsumeb is jointly controlled by American Metal Climax and Newmont Mining Corporation.
"Bantustans", designed to continue the domination by imperial interests. U.S.-A.I.D. is currently engaged in a $1 million survey of all the Southern African economies and their manpower needs. This study is aimed at bringing the states of Southern Africa more closely into the world capitalist system, creating "neo-colonies" out of the newly independent countries. For Namibia this means the economy would be further distorted by maximum mineral extraction at the expense of modernization and diversification of agriculture. The control of these "development" projects would remain in the hands of American and South African businessmen.

RESISTANCE BY THE NAMIBIAN PEOPLE

The people of Namibia have a long history of resistance to the exploitation of their country by foreign powers. The first colonial incursions were met by armed resistance. But African traditional weapons were eventually overcome by the superior weaponry of the Europeans. Turning to strikes, mass demonstrations and pleas for international action, the Namibian people continued to fight against forced removals from their land, high taxes and the contract labor system. Out of such demonstrations of popular resistance and the brutally repressive South African response, grew a liberation movement, the South West African People's Organization, or SWAPO. SWAPO grew out of the Ovamboland People's Organization, formed in 1959. Early militants were aided by the movement of population (due to the contract labor system) which
facilitated the movement and communication of organizers from the North to the South and Central regions. The organization began to adopt an increasingly national position, and officially re-formed as SWAPO in 1960. Since then, SWAPO has been involved in organizing throughout the country, as well as sending cadres abroad for training. SWAPO launched its armed struggle for national liberation on August 26, 1966.

Through political and military mobilization of the masses, SWAPO has gained the support of the people. It was active in the strikes of 1971 and 1972, when 20,000 Namibian workers stayed home in protest against the contract labor system. It called for a boycott of the South African-controlled elections in 1973 and 1974. Despite intimidation of non-voters, only a tiny percentage turned out to vote. SWAPO's armed forces, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) has scored many victories in its guerrilla war against the colonial regime, tying down 50,000 South African occupation forces. The independence of Angola under the MPLA has given the Namibians a neighbor committed to aiding their liberation. SWAPO has been able to intensify the struggle inside Namibia, and has sent more cadres to friendly African countries for military training and education.

South Africa and its allies are now trying desperately to find a new solution which will enable them to maintain their control of Namibia and its wealth. The Turnhalle Talks, initiated by South Africa and supported by the United States, aim at creating a federation based on ethnicity or tribes. SWAPO has rejected this neo-colonial plan and has pledged to continue the struggle for total liberation of the Namibian people.

Extracts from revised SWAPO Constitution

Definition
SWAPO is a national liberation movement rallying together, on the basis of free and voluntary association, all freedom-inspired sons and daughters of the Namibian people. It is the organized political vanguard of the oppressed and exploited people of Namibia. In fulfilling its vanguard role, SWAPO organizes, unites, inspires, orients and leads the broad masses of working Namibian people in the struggle for national and social liberation. It is thus the expression and embodiment of national unity, of a whole people united and organized in the struggle for total independence and social liberation.

Aims and Objectives

A. PREAMBLE
1) Whereas Namibia is still under foreign domination;
2) Whereas the Namibian people's inalienable and irrevocable right to self-determination and national independence is denied;
3) Whereas the occupying colonial power persists in its refusal to unconditionally withdraw all its repressive military and police forces and its administration from Namibia;
4) Whereas the occupying regime persists in its efforts to consolidate its illegal occupation by intensified repression and the fragmentation of Namibia into bantustans; and
5) Whereas the regime continues to disregard the Namibian people's deep yearning for freedom;

B. NOW, THEREFORE DO DECLARE THE BASIC AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF SWAPO AS FOLLOWS:
1) To fight relentlessly for the immediate and total liberation of Namibia from colonial and imperialist occupation;
2) To unite all the people of Namibia, irrespective of race, religion, sex or ethnic origin, into a cohesive, representative, national political entity;
3) To foster a spirit of national consciousness or a sense of common purpose and collective destiny among the people of Namibia;
4) To combat all reactionary tendencies of individualism, tribalism, sexism and regionalism;
5) To cooperate to the fullest extent with all the genuine national liberation movements, organizations and individuals throughout the world towards complete elimination of the colonial system of imperialism;
6) To establish in Namibia a democratic and secular government founded upon the will and participation of all the Namibian people;
7) To ensure that the people's government exercises effective control over the means of production and distribution and pursues a policy which facilitates the way to social ownership of all the resources of the country;
8) To work towards the creation of a non-exploitative and non-oppressive classless society;
9) To ensure that a people's government in an independent Namibia cooperates with other states in Africa in bringing about African unity;
10) To see that the people's government works in close co-operation with all peace-loving states towards world peace and security.

MEMBERSHIP
Membership of SWAPO shall be open to every Namibian who accepts the aims and objectives as set out above.
In pursuance of SWAPO's goal to create a non-sexist society, the organization has actively involved women in its work, and created a SWAPO Women's Council to facilitate such activity. The following interview with two SWAPO women militants vividly describes their experiences under colonial rule, the oppressive conditions under which the Namibian people, and especially Namibian women, live, as well as the determination of SWAPO to build a system to end the exploitation of Namibia by the imperialists. The interview was conducted in October 1976 by Carole Collins, a member of the Chicago Committee for African Liberation (CCAL), with Netumbo Nandi, Deputy Representative of SWAPO in Zambia and member of the Central Committee of SWAPO, and Mathilda Amoomo, Secretary in the Defense Office of SWAPO.

**LIFE UNDER COLONIALISM - WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS**

**CCAL:** What was life like for you as a Namibian woman growing up under South African colonialism?

**Netumbo:** I'm from the northern part of Namibia, near the Angolan border. The people are mostly subsistence peasant farmers, producing just enough for the family consumption until the next harvest season. Normally there is little or no surplus left after the family needs have been met. Much of the cultivation is done with manual tools, such as the hand hoe, although in recent decades, some families have started to use animal-drawn ploughs. Much of this agricultural work is done by women. In early times, men participated, though to a lesser extent than women, in tilling the land.

However, since colonialism the participation of the men in cultivation has decreased substantially. The African men were rapidly creamed off from the rural areas to work as cheap contract laborers in the colonialists' mining, fishing and ranching industries. Therefore, under colonialism the Namibian rural women have even harder times than before.
Netumbo: Husbands are not allowed to take their families along to the places of employment. Thus, women must always remain working in the fields, as well as looking after children at home and the overall household, while their husbands and the older boys are gone for very long spells—twelve to eighteen months—on their contract in the so-called "white areas". The men's wages are so meager that the drudgery of rural women's field work is hardly ever alleviated by such incomes.

The South African colonialists, and the Germans before them, made a conscious effort to prevent subsistence agriculture from evolving into advanced commercial farming. They prevented mechanization and large scale cultivation that would produce cash crops. The motive was to make sure that the largest number of African men would always be readily available for contract labor in the mines or on their plantations. As a consequence, much of the cultivation in rural Namibia is still done with hand hoes, and it is the women who do much of the field work, using their hands for tilling, sowing, weeding, harvesting and threshing.

Netumbo: Contract labor affects thousands of families in all the rural areas of Namibia. My personal experience represents a general pattern of what happened to many thousands of people.

In my own family, I have four brothers, two of whom work on contract labor. The third is a teenager, and still in school.
The fourth is a teacher. My father is a priest, running his own congregation. Both my father and the brother who is a teacher may be regarded as "professionals". They do not work on contract. The other two brothers who work on contract have been going back and forth to seek employment in towns and mining centers. They would go for 18 months and come back with a few personal effects which symbolize the lifestyle of urban people - like a bicycle, a couple of suits, three or four pair of trousers, and a few shirts. On their return home, they might give one of the two suits to our father or to one of the uncles, and one of the shirts to a brother. When these personal effects get worn out, they must go back to work on contract for 18 months. So the vicious circle is repeated year after year.

CCAL: Mathilda, where do you come from in Namibia and what were some of the problems you faced while growing up?

Mathilda: I am from the same area as comrade Netumbo. I can say that everything is equally true of my own experience. I can only
add one point. For the married Namibian rural women, much of their married life is spent in separation from their husbands. The longest time a married contract worker can stay with his family at home is about four months before he returns for 12 to 18 more months away on contract.

When the men are away for a year or more on contract the wives and daughters have to assume so many family responsibilities without the cheering help of their husbands and mature sons or cousins. For example, there is a severe shortage of clinics and hospitals in the rural areas. Malaria is always endemic among children in these areas, especially during the wet, rainy seasons. Although the rainy season is when people should spend much of their time cultivating their fields, more often than not you find women flocking with their children on their backs to far distant clinics in search of scarce medical services.

CCAL: In these rural areas, then, is it the women who do most of the agricultural work?

Mathilda: Yes. You find that apart from something like a one hour break at about 10 A.M. to go for breakfast and to feed children, women in these areas work in the fields from 5 A.M. to 1 P.M. from Monday to Saturday, every week. This is true whether you are talking about cultivation, weeding or harvesting seasons of the year. The men help when they are not on contract, except for threshing and grinding grain for flour, which is women’s work.

After spending up to 7 hours of backbreaking labor in the fields, women in the rural areas do not retire to rest for the day. They must also fetch water, grind grain into flour, and prepare meals, not to mention washing the babies and their diapers. I do not mean to suggest that our men do nothing at all. They cut and clear trees off the fields for cultivation, and dig wells to obtain drinking water for both people and animals. They look after the herds. But on the whole, these are far less energy-taking duties when compared to those performed by women.

Thus, apart from the negative effect of contract labor which disrupts normal family life and puts extra work pressure on women, there are also remnants of semi-feudal mentality among our men. These attitudes are being struggled against in the process of national liberation, which is the fundamental issue before the Namibian people now.

LIFE UNDER COLONIALISM - WOMEN IN TOWNS

CCAL: We’ve talked mostly about Namibian women in rural areas. Can you tell us what life is like for women in towns and cities under colonial rule?

Netumbo: German and South African settlers took away the people’s land and livestock in the southern and central parts of Namibia where most of the towns are located today. Both African men and women in these areas were reduced to the level of a dispossessed laboring class. The central and southern parts of
Namibia have been more intensely affected by white colonial settlement than those areas in the north. Evicted from their land, the people in these areas had to work on ranching estates of the colonial settlers, the men looking after the settlers' herds and the women working as domestic servants.

So towns developed and more and more women were drawn into the domestic service of the colonial settlers, working for mere subsistence wages. In most cases there was not even the question of wages. Women working as servants could obtain no wages but would be paid in terms of food and clothing handouts. This was the situation in the early days of colonial rule, especially during the German period.

Western corporate monopolies came to Namibia in order to extract minerals. There emerged a rapid process of extensive
mining activity. This meant that a large percentage of the Namibian men entered the labor force through contract labor in the mines. The women were left to do domestic service in the rapidly expanding towns. Whereas it was possible for the men who worked in the mining, construction and fishing industries for many years to become at least semi-skilled workers, it has been virtually impossible for women working in domestic service to acquire any kind of productive skills. The situation has not fundamentally changed since the days of German colonialism.

Neither the German nor the South African colonial regimes ever really bothered to establish institutions of learning for Africans which would have enabled Namibian women to acquire trades or professional skills. The only professional women you can find in Namibia's towns are nurses and teachers. But nearly all the women teachers are primary school level, which means that they are at the lowest scale of pay. The same is true with respect to nursing.

Urban women are slightly better off than rural women. The majority of urban women have at least a chance to get the rudiments of formal schooling. So most of the urban women are either literate or semi-literate. There are at least one or two "Bantu"* primary schools in most of the major towns, whereas in the rural areas there are many villages or districts which have no schools. So a good number of rural women have never sat under the roof of a classroom in their life.

In terms of health facilities, the service for the urban African population is far from adequate, but they are relatively better than those in rural areas. For those who can afford it, there are at least some private white doctors in towns with specialization in medical fields of particular concern to women. This does not mean that the majority of urban families are in a position to pay for such services. The majority must still depend on the few poorly equipped and over-crowded "native hospitals" which exist in some of the main towns in Namibia.

Since women generally do not participate in most of the key industries, such as mining, construction and transport, there is a comparatively high percentage of unemployed women in Namibian towns. The only industries which employ a small number of women are fishing and packing industries. You might find a few women working in fish canning factories at places like Walvis Bay and Luderitz Bay, Namibia's two most important centers of fishing industry. In places like Windhoek, the capital of Namibia, you might also find a few women working in the meat-packing industry.

Most of the lower professional jobs such as bank teller, secretary or clerk/typist are essentially reserved for white women in Namibia; and there are no trade schools to provide African women in the towns with skills.

* "Bantu" is the term used by the ruling white Afrikaaner regime to refer to Africans. "Bantu Education" is a system of education adopted by the Afrikaaner Nationalist Party in 1954, designed to train Africans only for the lowest levels of labor.
CCAL: What would be the average wage of a woman doing domestic work?

Netumbo: Women working in domestic service in the towns on the average would earn 10-15 Rand per month. ($15-20).

APARTHEID IN NAMIBIA

CCAL: In the cities and towns would husbands and wives be able to live together? We know in South Africa, African married couples are not allowed to do so in urban areas reserved for whites.

Netumbo: There are three different categories by which Africans may reside in towns. Firstly, there are those who live in townships on the outskirts of the proper towns. These people are considered by the colonialists to be "semi-permanent residents" in the urban areas. I say semi-permanent because by the very logic of the so-called separate development or homeland policy, an African cannot possibly become a fully permanent resident in the "white homeland" - the urbanized southern and central areas of Namibia. These people are issued semi-residential permits which allow them to remain in at least one or another of Namibia's towns.

The need for African labor has compelled the colonial administration to adopt this strategy of building townships on the edges of "white towns." It simply means that although the racist colonialists do not want to mingle with Africans, they still need us nearby so that we can serve them. In these
townships, husbands and wives can live together.

Secondly, there are African males who come into towns on contract labor to work in mining, construction, fishing, transport, commercial and service industries. By and large, these people live in large fenced-in compounds specifically set up for them. These are the people who cannot live with their wives. They must leave their wives behind in the rural areas from where they have been recruited as contract laborers. Like the townships, the compounds are also erected on the peripheries of the "white towns." But they are also separate from townships.

Thirdly, among those who come to the towns as contract laborers there are those who work in commercial and service industries, like salesmen, drivers, or in hotels and restaurants. Sometimes these people are housed in small servant quarters on their bosses' residential premises. These are usually located next to the master's garage. These workers were not allowed to live with their wives either.

In short, we can say that if a husband is on contract labor, he is not allowed to live with his wife, regardless of whether he lives in the yard of his boss or in the workers' compound.

CCAL: An identity pass is the key instrument of controlling the movements of the Africans in both Namibia and South Africa. Does every Namibian woman have to carry such a pass?

Netumbo: Yes, every adult African has to carry that pass wherever he or she might be. Before the beginning of the armed struggle which SWAPO launched in August, 1966, people in the rural areas were not required to carry identity passes. The carrying of such a pass was confined to the contract and urban Africans only. Now it is used also in an attempt to check the movement of our guerrillas in rural areas of the north, northeast and northwest.
Young Namibians make a few cents selling newspapers; the headline reports in Afrikaans an attempt by Ovambo migrant labourers to burn down the black police dormitories at Katutura using petrol bombs.

P. Fraenkel
SWAPO ORGANIZES THE PEOPLE

CCAL: Mathilda, when and why did you decide to join SWAPO?

Mathilda: It was in 1970, when I was at school. It was the oppressive conditions under colonialism that forced me to join SWAPO. I realized that SWAPO was the one political organization that could destroy the system which was oppressing us. SWAPO could deal with the problems of colonialism.

CCAL: How did you hear about SWAPO?

Mathilda: I came to learn about it when SWAPO started to organize meetings to let the people know that SWAPO is an organization fighting to take us out of colonialism. SWAPO did a lot of work among students. SWAPO organizers were always active among students after school, but they couldn't organize in public or they would be arrested. By 1972-73, this underground political work came into the open as SWAPO Youth League cadres began to organize large public meetings to politicize the masses.

CCAL: What were SWAPO's programs, and how did they deal with the problems you and other Namibians were facing?

Mathilda: The main program concerned the exploitation of the working people. SWAPO recognized from the very beginning that the division of the Namibian society into an exploiting white group and the exploited African group should be the first point of liberation attack. The Namibian workers work hard, but they are paid starvation wages. So SWAPO would educate the workers about the forces which are responsible for this exploitation. It is SWAPO which articulated the idea that the Namibian workers must fight to end colonialism and all of its oppression and exploitation. SWAPO also taught us that colonialism could not be ended without a hard struggle, and that it was necessary for every Namibian to join the fight. SWAPO took the lead too in exposing the sinister motives behind the South African policies of homelands* and Bantu Education.

CCAL: Netumbo, when and why did you join SWAPO?

Netumbo: SWAPO came into existence in Namibia in 1960. Even though I was young then, I could still not fail to be impressed by SWAPO's militant activities which were taking place in the country. Everyone could see what was going on. For example, in 1965, many public meetings were held by SWAPO in my own home area. Many pamphlets were distributed in the streets. You'd find some inspiring articles in the newspapers, maybe smuggled in the country from somewhere else. Seeing all this and seeing what SWAPO was doing and realizing what SWAPO said about the exploitative conditions existing in Namibia, I felt the urge to join. I found out that it's only through SWAPO that all the Namibian people could be united to face the colonizers. So that's why, in 1966, I joined SWAPO. At the time I was just 15 years old.

* "Homelands" are like reservations, the poorest land set aside for the African peoples. Only 39% of the land is "reserved" for Africans who are 85% of the population.
At that time I was an ordinary member and participated in many SWAPO-organized demonstrations. I started to help organize public meetings in 1972 and in 1973, was elected the northern regional chairman of the SWAPO Youth League. Those years the people of Namibia started to react much more strongly against the South African regime in the country, especially the workers and youth. The militant activities of the youth drew inspiration from the 1971-72 nation-wide strike by the workers in the mines. On August 15, 1973, I was arrested and imprisoned. I stayed in jail for three months and after April 1974 - immediately after the coup in Portugal - I left the country via Angola.

CCAL: How were you treated in jail?

Netumbo: While in jail, the treatment was as you can imagine. We were put in a small cell made to hold only 2 or 3 people, but we were 13 in that cell. It was made only of corrugated iron, with a concrete floor. There were no mattresses. Each of us was given only one blanket. It was in August - that's very hot in Namibia. The iron bars themselves were getting hot. The food we got was mealie meal porridge with nothing else. If we were lucky, maybe they'd put in too much salt. If they did put it in at all, it was always too much salt. Then, the next day they would put in no salt at all. We were not even allowed to go out for sunshine. We went out only when one of us was going to collect water. So it was hard.

CCAL: Why did they arrest you?

Netumbo: The only charge they brought against me was that I attended and organized "illegal" meetings in the country and influenced people with "communist ideas." As you may know, every anti-colonialist activity in Namibia is labelled "communist." Anti-communist reaction in the capitalist West has been exploited by the South African racist rulers to obtain sympathy in the West for their repressive colonial rule in Namibia.

CCAL: Why did they let you out of jail?

Netumbo: After spending three months in jail, we were brought before a magistrate court. SWAPO had organized a lawyer for us. The magistrate decided that we were to be released on condition that we would remain politically silent for the next three months. That was the time when hundreds of SWAPO Youth League activists were being subjected to brutal public floggings. As a result, the South African occupation regime came under an even heavier pressure from the outside world. So I think it was primarily because of this pressure that we were released. I am sure that the South African police could have re-arrested us because after our release my comrades and I in the SWAPO Youth League continued to mobilize the people. Luckily, however, the fascist regime in Portugal was overthrown. That made it possible for some of us to leave the country via Angola. We felt that at that stage much political groundwork inside the country had been done; now we needed to give more weight to the armed struggle.

CCAL: Mathilda, how did you hear about SWAPO?
Mathilda: It was not possible for anyone with ears to hear not to have heard about SWAPO in Namibia by 1970. As you might know, SWAPO launched its armed struggle in 1966. After the first armed clashes between the South African troops and SWAPO guerrillas, there was a sudden change in the whole political situation in Namibia. South African troops, paramilitary police, and secret agents were all over the place. By the end of 1966 nearly all the known leaders of SWAPO inside Namibia had been arrested and taken to Pretoria and Robben Island in South Africa. Many more were arrested and tortured severely by the police. There was a massive campaign to intimidate the whole population so that nobody should dare to give shelter or food to SWAPO guerrillas.

By 1970, SWAPO was again beginning to prepare the ground for a new round of political and military offensives. New groups of activists were busy organizing secret meetings all over the place, including at my school. They told us that SWAPO was fighting to take us out of colonialism.

Beginning with the great workers' strike of December, 1971 to February 1972, SWAPO activities again burst into the open. Meetings were held at many places in the country. I was involved in fund-raising. We needed to hire cars and to pay for petrol, food and propaganda materials whenever we were going to hold meetings at some distant places.

SWAPO MOBILIZES WOMEN

CCAL: You are both women who have become involved in the struggle for national liberation. Could you tell us about women's participation in SWAPO and what particular problems you face in mobilizing other women?

Netumbo: In the early stages of SWAPO, the participation of women was small, due to the lingerings of semi-feudal mentality and social structure in the country. We were basing ourselves on our old traditions that a woman is a woman, and as such, her place was in the kitchen. Against this background, the involvement of women in the struggle was relatively slow compared to that of our male comrades.

I must point out, however, that hundreds of Namibian women did participate in the historic Windhoek uprising of December, 1959, involving mass boycotts of public works, transport, cinema and beer halls in protest against the colonial regime's arbitrary removal of Windhoek's old African township to a new site which was located much farther away from town. Several women were among the 11 shot dead and 50 wounded. The Windhoek uprising represents an important point of departure in the history of our national liberation struggle. It marked the shift from the policies of petitioning the U.N. to that of mass agitation. In short, I can say women were slower than the men to get involved in the early years, but they were not very far behind because they too felt the oppression as much as the men.

CCAL: How did SWAPO try to mobilize women in the early stages of the organization?
Netumbo: Looking back to the end of the 1960's, it was impossible for SWAPO to become a truly people's organization without active and conscious participation of the masses of Namibian women. Accordingly, the Tanga Congress of December, 1969, to January, 1970, addressed itself to this question of mobilizing women through SWAPO's Women's Council.

Women suffer from an inferiority complex that is centuries old and deeply engrained, which tends to make women afraid to speak in public at meetings and to participate in decision-making processes. So the movement was dealing with not only general lack of organizational experience, but also a lack of self-confidence among women.

However, in the 1970's, women began to take a very active part in organizing meetings and rallies. We began to see that when SWAPO youth activists held meetings and demonstrations against colonialism, girls were sometimes in the majority. Some of the men began to re-think their traditional prejudices against women, as a good number of women began to be vocal at meetings. Colonial jails also began to be filled not only with men but also with women. When the South African government ordered mass public floggings of people's naked bodies in 1973, nearly half of the victims were women. Over the last two years thousands of Namibians decided to enlist in the People's Liberation Army of Namibia; a considerable number are women. Today you will find women at nearly every level of our movement's structure. But whatever has been achieved so far must be seen not only as a victory against the existing social and economic
structure which discriminates against women in employment and education, but also as a victory against the prejudices among some of our male comrades.

CCAL: What obstacles have you experienced as women as you participate in the struggle for national liberation?

Netumbo: At the organizational level obstacles to the participation of women are rarely ever noticeable nowadays; maybe you will find them on a personal basis. But on a personal basis they are not so effective as they could have been at organizational levels. For over half a decade now, women have been playing a very active role in SWAPO. Women have been participating in meetings and in elections. Some have distinguished themselves as being able public speakers, organizers and chairpersons. So, in the process, many more women have begun to realize that being able to do serious political work is not the monopoly of men. Similarly, many more male comrades have been able to overcome their feelings of male superiority.

CCAL: Are women participating at all levels in the work and struggle of SWAPO?

Netumbo: There is no doubt that women are participating at all levels of the struggle SWAPO is now waging. At the present moment, the only limitation is one's physical capabilities. If you are not physically fit to carry out some of the more difficult tasks, then you would not be allowed to do those kinds of work.

CCAL: In many struggles, women have found that men's attitudes have been an obstacle to their full participation. Has this been your experience too and if so, how have you overcome it?

Netumbo: In the course of our struggle, the male comrades' attitudes were also an obstacle to one degree or another. Little was expected of women's contribution. But this obstacle was taken
up by the women themselves when they started to demonstrate their capabilities in performing their duties equally well as did their male comrades.

THE SWAPO WOMEN'S COUNCIL*

CCAL: When was the SWAPO Women's Council organized and what are its aims?

Netumbo: The SWAPO Women's Council was organized in 1970 as part of an overall strategy mapped out at the Consultative Congress of SWAPO held at Tanga, Tanzania in late 1969. Its aim was to streamline the movement's organizational machinery for a new political and military offensive. This streamlining called for the creation of new mass organizations or functional units which would do political work in different sections of the Namibian society. Besides the Women's Council and the Union of Workers, the Congress also called for the formation of the SWAPO Youth League. The task of these units was to popularize the program of SWAPO among women, workers and youth, to make all the sectors of our population understand the situation better and to inspire them to participate fully in the struggle as well as to prepare them for a constructive role in the future independent Namibia. This was the main task entrusted to the SWAPO Women's Council.

CCAL: How is the Women's Council organized inside Namibia?

Netumbo: The Women's Council is a wing of SWAPO, not an independent organization. Thus its organization is along the same lines as SWAPO. SWAPO has sections, regional and district and branch structures. The structures of the Women's Council parallel these structures.

CCAL: Would every woman in the Women's Council be a member of SWAPO and vice versa?

Netumbo: Every member of the SWAPO Women's Council must be a member of SWAPO, because it's SWAPO's Women's Council and it is following and working for the same aims and objectives as SWAPO. And it's clear that each member of the SWAPO Women's council has agreed to the aims and objectives of SWAPO. Then there's no reason why she cannot be a member of SWAPO.

CCAL: What are some of the activities of the Women's Council?

Netumbo: The establishment of the Women's Council inside Namibia was a very difficult undertaking, as were all other anti-colonial political activities. The Council tried by all means to organize women in small meetings. A lot of effort had to be made to encourage women to participate more in SWAPO programs, such as those concerned with public meetings and demonstrations. All these provided occasions for educating the Namibian women politically. Consequently, it became apparent by 1972 that quite a good number of women were becoming very active.

* Also Known as "SWAPO Women's League"
When, for instance, the United Nations Secretary General, Dr. Kurt Waldheim and his personal representative, Dr. Alfred Escher, visited Namibia on different occasions in 1972, women came out in impressive numbers to urge the U.N. to take immediate and serious measures to assist the Namibian people to attain their national liberation.

By 1973, the South African colonial jails in Namibia were getting filled with SWAPO activists, including many women. This was basically a result of the politicizing work of both the SWAPO Women's Council and the Youth League. Today, you will find that in every district, municipality or village where there is a SWAPO branch, there is a Women's Council representative who is charged with the specific responsibility of organizing and politicizing women.

The enemy has come to fear the degree to which the Namibian women are participating in the struggle; and it was in an attempt to intimidate women that the South African regime sentenced two young women comrades in May, 1976. Mauna Mambinga and Anna Nghihondja were sentenced to a total of twelve years imprisonment on Robben Island. At the same time two other comrades, Aaron Maghimba and Hendrick Shikengo were sentenced to death.

CCAL: What contacts has the Women's Council had with organizations in the international context?

Netumbo: Since its establishment in 1970, the Council has not only worked with the local people in Namibia. We have also managed to make contacts with different women's organizations, both national and international. We have close working relations with women's organizations of the other liberation movements. The SWAPO Women's Council is furthermore a member of the Pan-African Women's Congress, whose headquarters are in Algeria. We have extensive contacts with many women's organizations at national levels, especially in Africa and in socialist countries. Many of the national and international women's organizations with which we have established contacts do give us both moral and material support. We have thousands of women under care of SWAPO. Some of these are living in Namibian Centers in the friendly neighboring countries, such as the People's Republic of Angola, the Republic of Zambia and Botswana. Many others are working in the PLAN's* revolutionary underground in our guerrilla zones of operation. These people have many social needs, such as clothing and medicine. It is in these fields of material assistance that many women's organizations have expressed their solidarity with the Namibian women. This we appreciate very much.

SWAPO AND WOMEN'S NEED FOR HEALTH CARE

CCAL: What kind of basic services exist for women and children in Namibia?

Mathilda: There are very few clinics for the rural population as a whole in those areas, so you can imagine that specific health services for women are non-existent. The South African colonial

* People's Liberation Army of Namibia -- SWAPO's Armed Forces.
regime has never concerned itself with the medical needs of the Namibian people. It has neglected the training of African medical and para-medical personnel. Namibia has been under South African colonial rule now for over half a century, but it was only some three years ago that two Africans qualified as medical doctors from the so-called "Bantu colleges" in South Africa.

You can rarely find a rural hospital that has more than two doctors, and none of these substandard rural hospitals has any of the specialized clinics such as those concerned with gynecology, obstetrics and pediatrics. Because of the poor quality of existing health services in rural Namibia, where the majority of the people live, Namibia's rate of infant mortality is one of the highest in the world. There are no community nurseries or daycare centers; women must take their babies to the fields with them.

CCAL: Does SWAPO have any programs to meet these health needs?

Mathilda: The political program of SWAPO states with sufficient clarity that comprehensive, free medical services for all citizens shall be one of the top most priorities in an independent, democratic and revolutionary Namibia, under the leadership of SWAPO.

Two of SWAPO's Departments, namely Health and Education, have already embarked upon a crash program for the training of medical and para-medical personnel. In the last two years alone, our movement has sent more than two hundred cadre to study medicine, nursing, dentistry, laboratory science, pharmacology, and public health services administration. Most of
these students are studying in socialist countries. Some are studying at various colleges in independent African countries. About half of the students are women. Of those young Namibians whom SWAPO sent abroad for schooling in the 1960's, one woman has qualified as a medical doctor. She is now working for the movement as a full-time doctor. She works with a male doctor and a team of about 40 nurses, both women and men. She is in full charge of our mobile clinics in the operational zones of the eastern front, the Caprivi and Okavango areas. She has also been instrumental in the establishment of the very sound clinic as well as a daycare center at the Namibia Health and Education Center in Zambia where more than two thousand Namibians reside.

Since this Center has been organized to be self-reliant, you would be impressed to see that the women do exactly the same kind and amount of work as do the men, when the children are at the daycare center. The men and women at the Center are organized into platoons to do construction and cultivation work. Since everything is done on a collective basis, both men and women must participate fully in all aspects of work, including cooking.

Our Movement's present health program covers more than 8,000 SWAPO members in Namibian centers in the People's Republic of Angola and the Republic of Zambia. It extends also to many more people in our operational areas inside Namibia. This service is directed at both preventive as well as curative medicine; and it can be regarded as a miniature representation of the type of services we would like to see in a free Namibia.
Many of the female nurses who left their jobs in Namibia in 1974 to join PLAN have since then gone through a crash program of re-training in military nursing and are doing good work.

THE FUTURE OF WOMEN IN NAMIBIA

CCAL: What are the future tasks of the Women's Council in the struggle for national liberation?

Netumbo: The immediate objective of SWAPO is the achievement of national independence. Its ultimate aim is the establishment of a truly free, democratic and classless society in Namibia. We have not even reached the first and most immediate objective yet. This always makes us aware of not becoming complacent with whatever accomplishments we might have made. But as we have been trying to show, the SWAPO Women's Council has succeeded in drawing thousands of Namibian women into our liberation activity. This liberation activity is in itself an important process of learning. It has exposed thousands of Namibian women to many new ideas which are revolutionizing their world outlook.

There are many things which remain to be done to mobilize women in the struggle for national and social liberation. The Council is striving constantly to raise the level of the Namibian women's political consciousness to ensure that the right of Namibia's women to participate fully in all political, cultural, social and productive activities of our society, is always at the center of policy decisions. It is only when the women themselves are armed with a high level of political consciousness that our movement can guarantee that reactionary ideas such as male chauvinism and female docility will have no place in a liberated Namibia.
We in SWAPO have come to the realization that the decisive factor in our liberation struggle is the conscious participation of the people.... Only the attainment of genuine national independence and social liberation can create the necessary conditions for human rights in Namibia. This is the background against which our liberation struggle is being waged.

Sam Nujoma, President of SWAPO
Solidarity with Namibia

Many progressive people in North America have been involved in solidarity work with Namibia. The BOYCOTT DEL MONTE campaign1 exposes Del Monte's overfishing of Namibian waters and connects this exploitation to the corporation's labor practices in the Southwest United States, Mexico and the Philippines. The LIBERATION SUPPORT MOVEMENT2 is raising money for a SWAPO printshop, which is now in operation in Luanda, Angola. Direct donations and the sale of SWAPO posters will ensure the continuation of the printshop during the crucial months ahead.

United States foreign policy has consistently supported South Africa's occupation of Namibia, even when this policy wears the "new face" of Carter and Young. The WASHINGTON OFFICE ON AFRICA and AMERICAN COMMITTEE ON AFRICA3 do research on and analysis of U.S. policy in Southern Africa as well as coordinating national legislative actions.

Groups involved in Southern Africa support and solidarity work throughout North America see the liberation of Namibia as a high priority; many work together through the COALITION FOR THE LIBERATION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA to coordinate their activities.4 A complete listing of member organizations is available on request. Join the struggle, to help in whatever way you can, contact one of the following organizations:

1. Del Monte Coalition, c/o Proppe, 3086 W. 11th St., Los Angeles, Ca. 90006.
   Bay Area Namibia Action Group, 944 Market St., #308, San Francisco, CA. 94101.
2. Liberation Support Movement, P.O. Box 2077, Oakland, CA. 94604.
   American Committee on Africa, 305 E. 46th St., New York, New York 10017.
"The children are the flowers of our revolution and the principal reason for our fight."

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SWAPO (special issue of LSM News, 1976) Includes historical background, development of liberation movement, SWAPO Constitution and Political Program. (Liberation Support Movement, P.O. Box 2077, Oakland, California 94604)

Interview with Andreas Shipanga, Director of SWAPO Information Services (1973, LSM.)

A Dwelling Place of Our Own: The Story of a Namibian Village by Randolph Vigne (1973, International Defence and Aid, Box 17, Cambridge, Ma. 02138)

Namibia: One Nation Uniting - packet of maps, chronology, history, corporate involvement, and action projects related to Namibia (BA-NAG, 944 Market St., #308, San Francisco, California 94101.)

Southern Africa - a monthly magazine of news and opinion about recent developments in Southern Africa (Southern Africa Committee, 156 5th Avenue, New York, New York 10011.)

Literature List on Southern Africa (75 titles of pamphlets and books including those titles listed above), available upon request from New World Resource Center, 1476 West Irving Park, Chicago, Illinois 60613.

The emancipation of women is not an act of charity, the result of humanitarian or compassionate attitude. The liberation of women is a fundamental necessity for the Revolution, the guarantee of its continuity and the precondition for its victory. The main objective of the Revolution is to destroy the system of exploitation and build a new society which releases the potentialities of human beings, reconciling them with labour and with nature. This is the context within which the question of women's emancipation arises.

(Samora Machel, Sowing Seeds of Revolution)

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